

Institutional development of Christianity, Hinduism and Islam in Suriname and Trinidad: an exploration in religious practices and festivities from 1900-2010¹

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Abstract

This article examines the institutional development of Christianity, Hinduism and Islam in Suriname and Trinidad. Unlike conventional theories that associate cultural diversity with threats for social stability, a development concept is used that perceives cultural diversity as an enriching asset for societies. The concept of development is based on three dimensions: participation, sustainability and concerted diversity. The study explores Suriname and Trinidad in the social sphere of religious practices and festivities from 1900 to 1945 and from 1946 to 2010. Suriname and Trinidad are compared, because they have similar major religions (Christianity, Hinduism and Islam), and both faced colonial assimilation policies. The study indicates that - unlike Suriname - in Trinidad the institutional development of Hinduism and Islam, compared to Christianity was less encouraged by government policies and by relations among Hindu and Muslim organizations during the whole period under study. The article illustrates the differences in the institutional development of Christianity, Hinduism and Islam between Suriname and Trinidad by analyzing the celebration of religious festivities and legal products, such as subsidies to religious organizations and legalization of religious marriages.

Key words: Institutional development, Suriname, Trinidad, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam

Introduction

Interreligious relations can be understood from the way religions develop particularly when viewed from a comparative perspective. Comparative studies at the international level indicate that government policies play an important role in the development of religions (Bouma and Singleton, 2004). However, at the regional level of the Caribbean, few comparative studies have been conducted on religious diversity that address the Dutch and English speaking Caribbean specifically². Therefore, this study attempts to fill in this lacuna by focusing on the institutional development of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam in Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago in the period from 1900 to the end of the Second World War (WW II) in 1945 and from 1946 up to 2010. Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago (hereafter, referred to as Trinidad) were selected for two reasons. The first reason is that they have identical major religious groups: Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. In both societies these religions together represent approximately three quarters of the population (table 1).

Table 1. Population by religion in Suriname and Trinidad

Religion	Suriname 2004		Trinidad 2000	
	Abs	%	Abs	%
Christianity	200744	40.7%	641930	57.6%
Hinduism	98240	19.9%	250760	22.5%
Islam	66310	13.5%	64648	5.8%
None+own	38076	7.7%	21598	1.9%
Other	12255	2.5%	120666	10.8%
Not stated	77204	15.7%	15170	1.4%
Total	492829	100.0%	1114772	100.0%

Source: Algemeen Bureau voor de Statistiek, Statistical Papers 5, 2007; Census Report of Trinidad, 2000.

The second reason for comparing Suriname and Trinidad is that both societies endured a history of colonial assimilation policies that favored Christianity over Hinduism and Islam. Even so, mass conversion of Hindus and Muslims did not occur. On the contrary, Hindus and Muslims strengthened their religious identity, particularly by establishing their own religious institutions (Vertovec, 1992; Bakker, 1999).

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Available on-line: September 27, 2011

1. Theoretical background

Differences in interreligious relations can be understood from the development of religious institutions. Hence, development is an important concept. This has to be carefully defined in relation to cultural diversity. There are theories, such as the concept of plural society, that tend to assign a negative connotation to cultural diversity as though this diversity would hinder the harmony between groups. A serious shortcoming of studies that applied this concept is that they emphasized differences or negative perceptions between cultural groups and “leave little or no room for understanding common cultural values and behavior as a result of inter-ethnic relations in a wider context of the national society” (Menke, 2010: 2).

To better understand interreligious relations in Suriname and Trinidad, this study applies a concept of development that regards religious diversity as a potential asset to harmony in a nation. This concept is borrowed from Glenn Sankatsing (2010) who posits development as “the mobilization of the own potentialities and resources in interactive response to nature, habitat, resources and history for a project of self-realization under own command”. There are two benefits of using Sankatsing’s approach to development. Firstly, he pays explicit attention to colonial influences on postcolonial societies. He argues that due to development concepts the societies in the America’s and the Caribbean became a ‘scar of oppression’ (Sankatsing, 2007:1) rather than being born out of own potentialities and social dynamism in a natural way. Metaphorically described, they became remote-controlled trailer societies that responded to the commands of Europe (ibid). Secondly, Sankatsing conceptualizes cultural diversity as an enriching asset rather than an obstacle. It is in this view that broader analysis of the nature of interreligious relations becomes possible in religiously diverse societies in the Caribbean. This brings to one the dimensions of development that enable these analyses, namely concerted diversity. Sankatsing distinguishes three dimensions of development that are closely interconnected with each other: participation, concerted diversity and sustainability. Participation is the ingredient that ensures development as a process from within. It deals with the involvement of people in their own social projects, through proper democratic systems.

Concerted diversity stresses the equality of various groups in a society and their ability to deal with conflicting interests. Sankatsing (2007) metaphorically explains this concept. The diversity of social groups, organisms and processes in a society can be compared with a concert. Each group, organism and or process represents a musical instrument. If they are played individually, they

cannot make a concert. But if played together, their individual characteristics produce a collective sound, which makes a concert beautiful. Concerts rely on the contribution of various musical instruments. With reference to social life, concerted diversity addresses the variety of cultures, thoughts, and species that - similar to musical instruments - can be an enriching asset rather than a social problem. In the process of self-realization, contradictory interests and needs can emerge because diversity and differences have a material base. According to the concept of concerted diversity, in such cases conflicting parties deliberately accept what is seen as the ‘best available’ solution for the time being, rather than forcing homogeneity, uniformity and consensus. It is not the unification, but again the respect for different needs and interests and the reconfirmation of diversity among the people, that bear the seeds for solutions. Concerted diversity is based on a collective belonging stimulated by solidarity and built on tolerance.

Sustainability emphasizes the provision and the maintenance of forces that support the process of self-realization of social groups through participation. The first force is people’s ability to decide the realization of their own needs and interests and settle potential conflict by themselves. The second force is that democratic systems exist to facilitate this realization through participation of the people in their society. The third force is the cosmic desire to grow, to flourish and even combat death by reproduction (Sankatsing, 2007). As these three forces work together, development as a process of self realization becomes continuous and sustainable.

This study approaches religion as an institution which can be both communities and organizations. Communities are defined as individuals that have a common identity and share social relations. Organizations are “vehicles for social action” (Scott 2001: 88). Based on the approach to development and institution, institutional development is described *as a process in which religious institutions realize their own needs and interests by mobilizing their own potentialities and resources in interactive response with the environment.*

2. Methodology

The article is based on a thesis research which used a comparative case study design, as it allows understanding of social phenomena by comparing two or more meaningfully contrasting cases or situations (Bryman, 2004). Case studies have the benefit that they can broaden insight in various patterns, the interconnectedness between involved actors, related issues, and different nuances (Berg, 2007). As the aim is to illustrate and explain

differences in interreligious relations between Suriname and Trinidad, a contrasting case was selected in the media. The latter was relevant, due to its characteristic to report about issues concerning various groups such as religions that crosscut the social spheres of a society. In this way insight could be gained in the institutional development of the religions in all the social spheres under study. However, for the purpose of this article, the social sphere of religious festivities and practices is discussed, as it was the only social sphere that illustrated the working of the three dimensions of development: participation, sustainability, concerted diversity.

Data collection methods were documentary research, interviews and participatory observation. The documentary research consisted of a large variety of documents including archives of religious organizations and private collections of informants. The literature consisted of census publications, scholarly works, newspapers, personal photographs and letters as well as contemporary publications by religious organizations. A wide range of interview techniques was applied: open and semi-structured interviews, oral history, focus group and telephone interviewing. Participatory observation was used in

Trinidad by attending Hindu events and Muslim prayer services and carrying out Church visits.

3. Institutional development of the religions 1900-1945

The introduction of the indentured workers in the 19th and 20th century changed the religious diversity in Suriname and Trinidad. During the indentured period in Suriname (1873 – 1916) 37,000 British Indians entered the country, of which 12,000 (32%) had returned to India by 1917 (de Klerk, 1953). 33,000 Javanese indentured workers from Dutch East Indies were also introduced to Suriname between 1890 and 1939 (Ramsoedh and Bloemberg, 1995). In Trinidad 143,939 East Indian indentured workers had immigrated, of which 29,448 (18%) returned to India by 1880 (Vertovec, 2001). In both societies the majority of the East Indians were Hindus (Hassankhan, 1993; Ramesar, 1994; Vertovec, 2001), while Muslims comprised a small group of these indentured workers. In Suriname, Javanese immigrants also contributed to the Muslim population (De Waal Malefijt, 1963).

Table 2. Percentage Christians, Hindus and Muslims in Suriname and Trinidad 1900-1930s³

Denomination	Suriname 1900	Trinidad 1901	Suriname 1906	Trinidad 1911	Suriname 1936	Trinidad 1931
Christians	76.0%	70.2%	70.3%	69.5%	48.7%	71.5%
Hindus	16.4%	25.2%	16.8%	25.5%	21.8%	22.7%
Muslims	5.7%	4.2%	11.3%	4.5%	28.7%	5.1%
Others	1.9%	0.2%	1.5%	0.4%	0.7%	0.5%
Not stated	-	0.2%	-	0.1%	-	0.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total Absolute	68141	273899	81273	333552	148971	412783

Source: West Indian Census, 1946; Vernooij, 2011; Jap A Joe, Sjak Shie, Vernooij, 2001, compiled by Kirtie Algoe

The comparison of demographic data of the two societies indicates that at the turn of the 20th century the share of Christians and Muslims in the national population of Suriname was larger than in Trinidad (table 2). However, the relative number of Hindus in Suriname was smaller.

The comparison of the changes within the three religious populations between the societies from the early 20th century to the 1930s shows three differences. Firstly, the proportion of Christians in the Surinamese population declined drastically from 76 to 49%, while in Trinidad the proportion of Christians in total increased slightly (from 70 to 72%). Secondly, the Hindu population in Trinidad became relatively smaller (from 25 to 23%), while in Suriname this group grew larger (from 16 to 22%). Thirdly, the share of Muslims in the Surinamese population increased remarkably (from 6 to 29%), while in Trinidad the proportion of this group did not change significantly (from 4 to 5%).

The demographic changes in Trinidad and Suriname from 1900-1945 are linked to the institutional development of the three major religions. The two societies had in common that the institutional development of Christianity was more favored than Hinduism and Islam in the social sphere of religious practices and festivities, but still there was a remarkable difference. In Trinidad the institutional development of Hinduism and Islam was hampered, although not in Suriname. Factors of institutional development were colonial government policies, responses to these policies, relations among religious bodies of a particular religion and mobilization of own resources. I will discuss these factors according to the three dimensions of institutional development: sustainability, participation and concerted diversity.

Colonial government policies

Colonial government policies in Suriname and Trinidad facilitated the sustainability of

Christianity through legal recognition of its religious rituals and festivities. Illustrative were the burial law and Christian public holidays. This is comprehensible as Christianity was the official religion in the two societies. However, the difference between the two societies is that in Trinidad the sustainability and recognition of Hinduism and Islam were less supported and facilitated compared to Suriname. This can be interpreted as a stronger attempt to assimilate the society religiously in Trinidad than in Suriname. Two examples of religious practices and festivities illustrate this difference. The first example is the 'firepass' ritual in Trinidad. This was a practice among the Hindu indentured workers of South India (*Madrasis*) where priests walked over smoldering ashes (Laurence, 1994). Trinidadian colonial authorities, who were Christians, outlawed the fire walking ceremonies because these seemed 'horrid' to them as these contradicted their norms of religious practices which were most likely derived from Christianity (Vertovec, 1992). Such a perception was biased, because to the Hindus the ritual was part of their religion that they used to practice in India. The outlawing of the 'firepass' ritual largely reflected the superiority of Christianity and the marginalization of Hinduism in the space for religious practices in Trinidad. In Suriname no similar cases of outlawing Hindu rituals have been reported.

The second example regards the celebration of the Islamic holiday *Hosay* in Suriname and Trinidad. During *Hosay* the sacrifice of the grandsons of the prophet Mohammed is commemorated (De Boer, 2001). In both societies this festival gradually developed itself as an event with participants from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. During the festival, processions of competing bands were held, and participants consumed rum. The celebrations often ended in fights and violence on the plantations. In Trinidad however, the government intervened in these fights more rigidly than in Suriname to regulate the plantation labor. The Trinidadian colonial authorities introduced an Ordinance for Regulating the Festivals of Immigrants in 1884. While it was meant to regulate the festivals, this Ordinance included measures that officially stimulated ethnic divisions and discouraged the celebrations (Laurence, 1994). The execution of this ordinance was supported by a justice system using violence. In 1884 for instance the *Hosay* festival ended in bloodshed created by local and foreign police firing unnecessarily in San Fernando. 13 people were killed and many more wounded (Ramesar, 1994).

The difference with Suriname is that fights also took place between the participants during the *Hosay* festival, but colonial authorities did not seem to intervene immediately by using a large police

force assisted by foreign countries as was done in Trinidad. The Dutch authorities in Suriname allowed these fights as long as they themselves were not attacked, and probably because immigrants could ventilate their frustrations on the plantations instead of making the colonial officials their target (De Boer, 2001). During fights, the authorities first seemed to attempt to restore public order without the use of police force and violence. One example is the *Hosay* celebration in district Commewijne, resort Zoelen, in 1891. During the celebration fights began between the participants. The plantation director, James Mavor, intervened and managed to maintain order. Unfortunately, in the mean time, the attorney general (AG) in the city had been alerted by someone. The AG arrived with military assistance and some immigrants were arrested. As a result other workers started to throw stones at the soldiers which led to firing. Four immigrants were fatally shot and five were terribly injured (De Boer, 2001). This example shows that responses of Dutch colonial authorities to fights were first aimed at conciliation rather than violent intervention as in Trinidad. In this way, the colonial authorities in Suriname provided more space for religious activities than in Trinidad, which contributed to the sustainability of the religion. Other contributions to the Islamic society came from the planters in Suriname. According to colonial records, they facilitated the Javanese Muslim workers in religious and cultural practices by giving them musical instruments such as a *gamelanset*⁴ in the 1930s (Towikromo, 1997).

Responses to colonial government policies and relations among religious organizations of a particular religion

A good example that illustrates the responses to colonial government policies in the social sphere of religious practices and festivities, and the influence of relations among organizations of a particular religion, is the legalization of Hindu and Muslim marriages in early 20th century. In both Suriname and Trinidad the recognition of these marriages emerged due to inheritance problems of Hindu and Muslim children. The reason was that these children were seen as illegitimate in both societies due to the fact that Hindus and Muslims did not choose to marry according to the existing civil marriage law (Ramsoedh, 1990; Vertovec, 1992; Laurence, 1994). To counter this problem, the Hindu and Muslim organizations requested the colonial government to legally recognize Hindu and Muslim marriages.

The difference between the two societies is that in Suriname the colonial government itself appealed for the Hindu and Muslim marriage law, while in Trinidad local Hindu and Muslim groups appealed and protested for a long time for the legalization of their religious marriages. Their

appeals remained unheard by the government. As a result the immigrants' organizations engaged in campaigns. Pressure was increased by the East Indian National Association (EINA) as far back as the late 1880s (Vertovec, 1992). EINA presented petitions and wrote letters to the newspapers and to the government for the recognition of Hindu and Muslim marriages. In 1924 the colonial authorities in Trinidad responded to their demands by drafting bills on 'Indian' marriages. However the Hindu and Muslim organizations were not satisfied with these bills (Jha, s.a.). As a result, processes for the legalizations were stagnated. In addition, frictions among Hindu society caused more delay in the legalization process. This community was fragmented into several organizations that could not agree on the special legal arrangements such as the divorce bill and eligible age of marriage (Vertovec, 1992), while the Muslim communities did not have these issues (Jha, s.a.). The Muslims reached an agreement sooner than the Hindus, and were therefore able to get their marriages recognized earlier (1936) than the Hindus (1945) (Vertovec, 1992).

As opposed to the Trinidadian experience with colonial government policy, in Suriname some colonial authorities themselves supported the legalization of Hindu and Muslim marriages before 1900 (Ramsodh, 1993). These requests increased after the appointment of governor Kielstra, as the marriage law was part of his politics of representation of cultural diversity in public sectors. Interesting is that Kielstra, despite the rejection of parliament members to pass the marriage law several times (Adhin, 1969), sought a way to get it passed. During the Second World War, Kielstra used special legal provisions to pass the law without the approval of the other members in the parliament. As a result, in 1940 both Hindu and Muslim marriages were legalized (Ramsodh, 1993). The legalization of these marriages discontinued the colonial assimilation policy in Suriname (Ramsodh and Bloemberg, 1995), which was not the case in Trinidad.

The legalization of the Hindu and Muslim marriage law shows differences between Suriname and Trinidad with regard to responses to colonial government policies and relations among religious bodies of a particular religion. In Trinidad colonial government policies facilitated the legalization of Hindu and Muslim marriages after protests of religious organizations, while in Suriname the marriages were legalized by support of the governor himself without the public protests of religious groups.

With regard to relations among religious bodies of a particular religion, the difference between the two societies is that frictions among the

Hindu bodies in Trinidad stagnated the institutional development of Hinduism, which did not occur in Suriname.

Mobilization of own human, financial and material resources

Besides the colonial government policies, responses to these policies and relations among religious bodies of a particular religion, the institutional development of the three major religions in Suriname and Trinidad was also influenced by the mobilization of own material, financial and human resources. To sustain their own religion, Christians, for instance, organized missionary activities among immigrants with own human resources (Schalkwijk, 2001; Teelucksingh, 2008). Hindus and Muslims established small temples and mosques with own material resources to conduct their religious rituals (Choenni, 1982; Vertovec, 2001). The difference between the two societies, however, lies in the nature of Christian missions. As mentioned before, the relative proportion of Christians in Trinidad remained stable between 1900 and 1930, while in Suriname this proportion decreased significantly. One explanation is that the colonial government policies favored the institutional development of Christianity by legal recognition of Christian festivities and practices. Another explanation is the role of the missionary activities of Christians. The difference between the two societies is that these missionary activities, which provided upward social mobility for those who converted to Christianity, led to a larger conversion among the Hindu and Muslim immigrants in Trinidad than in Suriname. In both societies, Christians had far more public and private educational facilities than Hindus and Muslims. These facilities enabled them to meet educational requirements for jobs, for instance within the civil service. I will not discuss this in detail here, because it would require addressing other social spheres in Suriname and Trinidad. Important is that due to the Christian missions, less than 5% of the East Indians in Suriname had converted to Christianity (Ramsodh and Bloemberg, 1995; Schalkwijk, 2001) by the end of the indentured period. On the contrary, in Trinidad, according to the census of 1921, almost 12% of this group had converted (Singh, 1996). In both societies Muslims converted on a smaller scale, because according to Christian missionaries, they were found more difficult to convert to Christianity (Laurence, 1994; Gooswit, 2002). The difference in conversion rates can be explained by the nature and duration of Christian missions. In Trinidad the Christian missions started much earlier and were more intense than in Suriname. In Trinidad, the main missionary activities among Hindus and Muslims had been conducted since the 1860s by the Canadian

Presbyterian Church, but the immigrants were already confronted with conversion attempts by the Anglican Church soon after arrival (Teelucksingh, 2008).

With regard to Suriname, the first missions, also called the 'Kuli-Mission' and later 'East Indian Mission' by the Moravian Church, started with conversion activities in 1904 (Schalkwijk, 2001), which was much later than the arrival of the East Indian immigrants on the plantations. These differences indicate that East Indian immigrants in Trinidad were confronted with Christian missions for a longer time than in Suriname.

In addition to the longer duration of the Christian missionary work, missions in Trinidad seemed more intense than in Suriname. This is expressed in the evangelization methods of the Presbyterian Church that sustained its religion. This church accommodated Hinduism and Islam on a large scale by using structures of these religions in missionary activities. Illustrative are the *Eesu bhadjans and Eesu katha*⁵ (Teelucksingh, 2008). The Presbyterian Church also used structures of the *panchayat*, a village council of elders in the East Indian communities, to communicate in villages (Ramnarine, 2004).

In Suriname similar missionary activities carried out by the Moravian Church and the Catholic Church are not reported. They used Hindi in their missions, but the same accommodation of Hinduism by the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad did not seem to exist. On the contrary, in Suriname, Christian missions were not always supported by the

planters. Abbenhuis (s.a.) for instance observes that the Javanese mission of the Catholics was prohibited by the planters, because it was perceived as a threat to labor stability on the plantations.

Based on the higher conversion rates due to the Christian missions in Trinidad, it is likely that Hindu and Muslim organizations faced more difficulties to sustain their own religion than in Suriname. Taking these difficulties into account, the next chapter discusses the institutional development of the three major religions in the social sphere of religious practices and festivities in Trinidad and Suriname between 1946 and 2010.

4. Institutional development of the religions 1946-2010

Demographic data of the three religions from 1946 to the early 21st century in Suriname and Trinidad show an important similarity. The share of Christians declined and the relative number of Hindus remained largely stable. The difference is that from 1946 to 2004 the proportion of Muslims decreased significantly in Suriname, while in Trinidad this proportion remained the same (table 3).

In Trinidad the decrease of the share of Christians in the national population between 1946 and 2004 is explained by the institutional development of Hinduism and Islam (will be discussed later).

Table 3. Percentage Christians, Hindus and Muslims in Suriname and Trinidad 1946-2004

Denomination	Suriname 1946	Trinidad 1946	Suriname 1964	Trinidad 1960	Suriname 1980	Trinidad 1980	Suriname 2004	Trinidad 2000
Christians	46.8%	70.9%	43.9%	71.4%	41.6%	61.9%	40.7%	58.2%
Hindus	19.5%	22.6%	27%	23%	27.4%	24.9%	19.9%	22.6%
Muslims	32.0%	5.8%	19.7%	5%	19.6%	6.0%	13.5%	5.8%
None	-	0.4%	5.5% ⁶	-	8.5% ⁷	1.0%	7.7% ⁸	1.9%
Other	0.5%	0.2%	1.2%	0.1%	1.7%	5.1%	2.5%	10.8%
Not stated	-	0.1%	2.8%	0.5%	1.2%	1.0%	15.7%	1.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total absolute	173404	557970	324211	827957	355240	1055763	492829	1114772

Source: West Indian Census, 1946; Trinidad and Tobago C.S.O., Annual Statistical Digest, 1973; Census Report Trinidad, 2000; Vernooij, 1998; Vernooij, 2011, compiled by Kirtie Algoe

The proportion of Hindus in the national population of both societies changed significantly probably due to the emergence of opportunities for upward social mobility of Hindus without the necessity to convert to Christianity. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Christian missions provided opportunities for upward social mobility - such as jobs in the civil services - in both societies. However, after 1945 the institutional development

of Hinduism and Islam in various spheres, especially education, created conditions which enabled the improvement of social and economic conditions. Hence, Hindus and Muslims no longer depended upon Christian missions that required conversion to their religion.

In Suriname, in 2000, the category 'not stated' is far larger than in Trinidad. Therefore explaining the decrease of the relative number of

Muslims and Christians in Suriname between 1946 and 2000 has limitations.

The demographic changes can be understood from the institutional development of the three religions in the social sphere of religious practices and festivities. It was stated before that from 1900-1945 colonial government policies, responses to these policies, relations among religious organizations of a particular religion and mobilization of own human, financial and material resources influenced the institutional development. I will elaborate on these factors for the period 1946-2010 according to the three dimensions of institutional development: sustainability, concerted diversity and participation.

Government policies and responses: subsidies

After 1945, Hinduism and Islam gained gradual access to government subsidies for their temples and mosques, and for religious leaders in Suriname and Trinidad. These subsidies were important for the sustainability of the religions. However, in both societies the subsidies were less in comparison to what Christianity received. The following is illustrative for Suriname during the early 1960s:

Although tens of thousands of Muslims (including the Javanese) live here, one apparently sticks to the idea that Suriname is a Christian country. (...) Despite the significantly large number of Muslims in Suriname, we get only 2300 guilders for Islamite Prophetic interests (Prins, 1961: 19) (translated by author).

Illustrative for Trinidad is an interview with Hans Hanoomansing⁹, who was president of the National Council of Indian Centre (NCIC) in 1972. He mentions:

I had experiences as a president of NCIC with the 10th independence anniversary of our country. The government had set up a committee for funding and planning the anniversary celebrations. I approached the chairman of this committee who was of Chinese origin for funding of two Indian cultural events: a local song and a local folk singing competition. I got financial assistance. It was all right to our needs, but token compared to what was generally offered. The chairman said to us that Indian culture was a foreign culture.

Both in Suriname and in Trinidad, Hinduism and Islam faced inequalities in subsidies in respectively the early 1960s and 1970s. However, unlike in Trinidad, from the 1970s onwards in Suriname the subsidies for Hindu and Muslim organizations increased¹⁰. In Trinidad the feeling of being marginalized in government subsidies compared to other religions was still present in the

21st century. Illustrative for Trinidad is the following:

The Ministry supplied an expenditure breakdown for a number of Indian and non-Indian events in which the Indian expenditure was higher than non-Indian cultural activities by \$145,000. The Maha Sabha¹¹ views these sums supplied as bogus and not representative of the actual total expenditure by the Ministry on culture. The release has to be seen as a mere public relations strategy to answer a growing dissatisfaction within the Indian community on the disparity by the Ministry's treatment of Indian culture versus non-Indian culture (Maharaj, 2002: 26).

As discussed before, when compared to Suriname, the government policies in Trinidad were less supportive to the institutional development of Hinduism and Islam than to Christianity between 1946 and 2010. This resulted in responses of Hindu and Islamic organizations to these policies by mobilizing own resources for the sustainability of their religion which will be addressed in the next paragraph.

Mobilization of own human, financial and material resources

From 1946 up to 2010 in both societies the celebration of Hindu and Muslim holidays expanded. These celebrations, especially at the community level, have been celebrated in Trinidad since the 1950s. For instance, as Stephen Kangal remembers, the Hindu *Divali* celebrations were organized by Hindus and Muslims particularly in rural community areas with own material resources¹².

Regarding this celebration in the 21st century and the inequality in government subsidies for festivities of Indo-Trinidadians, Hans Hanoomansing, for instance points out that own human and financial resources were mobilized for the first celebration of *Divali* in 1972 at the national level organized by the National Council of Indian Culture. Hanoomansing asked his personal staff to do the administrative tasks. With subsidies from good relations he financed the travelling costs of special guests of India invited for the celebration¹³. In this way the mobilization of own resources contributed to the sustainability of Hinduism.

Hans Hanoomansing and Kumar Mahabir point out that many Hindu and non - Hindu citizens such as bank employees would wear Indian dresses to work and would also celebrate by lighting *diyas*. These celebrations give the impression of harmony and solidarity between the different ethnic/religious groups, which can be interpreted as concerted diversity.

In Suriname various Hindu festivities such as *Divali* celebrations in communities in rural and urban area are financed by donations and fundraising programs coordinated for instance by the Organization Hindu Media (OHM, 2009). Christian and Muslim organizations such as *Leger des Heils (Salvation Army)* and *Surinaamse Islamitische Vereniging (SIV)* also have various fundraising programs.

Relations among religious organizations of a particular religion

Some interesting differences are identified between Suriname and Trinidad with regard to the influence of relations among Hindu and Muslim religious organizations on the institutional development of Hinduism and Islam. For Hinduism, the difference is that in Trinidad some largely celebrated Hindu practices changed as a response to the hegemony of the caste system within this religion, while in Suriname such adaptations of practices are not reported. Illustrative is the celebration of *Ganesh Utsav*. Ravendranath Maharaj mentions that this festival, which is celebrated in honor of Hindu God *Ganesh*, used to have a 'brahmic' format. These rituals were performed by Brahmin pundits of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, an organization that follows caste rules for membership in institutions (Vertovec, 1992). During the rituals the focus used to be on conducting rites and religious speeches by pundits rather than activities with engagement of the participants. As the informant describes, the people that attended the *Ganesh Utsav* were more a passive audience than actively involved in the religious program of the event. To increase the participation in the 1980s the informant gradually introduced the art, chanting, medical services and processions in the celebration, while at the same time reducing speaking time for the pundits¹⁴.

This example indicates that religious rituals changed in Trinidad in response to limited participation of the members within the own religion at the community level. There might be two reasons why these changes have not been reported in Suriname. One reason is that the Hindu caste system existed on a smaller scale at the community level in Suriname than in Trinidad. There are scholars who even argue that the caste system disappeared after the indentured workers arrived in Suriname (Hira, 2003). However, this cannot be stated as there are still religious rituals such as the *janaw* that prove the existence of the caste system¹⁵. Yet unlike Suriname, in Trinidad the caste system largely existed at the community level in the 1960s. Illustrative are the prayer services in people's homes that are conducted by the Brahmins rather than non-Brahmins (Singh, 2004). The caste system was strengthened by the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, that standardized the

Hindu practices through publication and building of temples (Vertovec, 1992). In this way Hinduism was defined and practiced from a Brahmic perspective.

Another reason why changes in rituals due to limited *participation* of members within the Hindu bodies do not seem to be reported in Suriname, might be that the caste system in this society did not significantly limit the participation of members at the institutional level the way it did in Trinidad. In the latter society non-Brahmin pundits were resisted by the SDMS, while the latter dominated the Hindu practices. This created bitterness about the Brahmic dominance among the non-Brahmins. To counter this dominance, which is a struggle for participation in leadership of Hindu bodies, the Divine Life Society emerged in 1962 (Singh, 2004). Such struggles did not appear in Suriname; non-Brahmins could also become pundits (Den Boer, 2009).

With respect to Islam, the difference between the two societies is that the relations among the Muslim organizations sometimes reduced their accessibility to state resources in Trinidad more than in Suriname. The government refused demands for a parcel of land by the Islamic Missionaries Guild (IMG) in 1969. At the same time, the subsidies this organization received were also frozen. The reason, as Ghany (1996) observes, might be the controversies among the Muslim bodies: the Tackveeytul Islamic Association (TIA) and the Anjuman Sunnatul Jamaat Association (ASJA). These bodies, as argued by Ghany (1996), might have objected to the demands of IMG in letters written to the government. This case indicates a negative impact of controversies among Muslim bodies on the institutional development of Islam in Trinidad rather than in Suriname.

So far the institutional development of the three religions is largely addressed at the institutional level in Suriname and Trinidad. At the community level an interesting activity in the two societies seems to be the celebration of religious festivities.

Celebration of religious festivities

Among Hindus in Suriname *Divali* has been celebrated at the community level since the 1950s¹⁶. Non-Hindus would celebrate this festival, by visiting their Hindu neighbors and extending greetings. They would also share in the meals at the homes of the Hindus. It is noteworthy that in Suriname a *Suriname diya* is being lit annually since a few years. Its aim is to promote the solidarity among the various cultures and religions in Suriname¹⁷. The celebration of the *Divali* festival both by Hindus and non-Hindus is an

illustration of concerted diversity, as it expresses solidarity and harmony among different cultures.



Figure 1 *Divali* celebration in Suriname (Source: OHM Suriname, 2009)

Another popular Hindu festival in both societies has been the *Ramleela*, a drama based on the Hindu epic of *Ramayana*. In the 1950s in Suriname Basharat Ahdmadali, a Muslim, points out: “We went to the *Ramleela* in Hanna’s Lust and we arrived on the site before it started just to find a proper place to sit. I must tell you, we attended almost all the *Ramleela*’s in our neighborhood”¹⁸. These Hindu practices are still celebrated in the 21st century in a harmonious way at the community level in both societies.

The Islamic festival *Hosay* is also celebrated harmoniously by different religious groups in both societies. In Suriname, Basharat Ahdmadali observes that in the 1950s people from the city came to the *Rahemalbuiten*, in district Wanica, to celebrate this festival¹⁹. However, this festival is no longer celebrated in Suriname, while in Trinidad it still is.



Figure 2 *Hosay* celebration in Trinidad (Source: Indian Arrival Day Magazine, 2008)

Another Islamic festival is *Id-ul-Fitr*. In

Trinidad, Inshan Ismael, points out that during the Islamic *Id-ul-Fitr* neighbors would come by to congratulate and celebrate the festival²⁰. In Suriname this festival is celebrated in a similar way²¹. *Id-ul-Fitr* in Suriname is celebrated in a unique way since the 1970s. The Javanese and East Indian Muslims pray together at the Independence square; a service coordinated by the *Madjilis Muslim Stichting* (MMS). This organization represents Muslims of both ethnic groups to the government (Jap A Joe, Sjak Sjie, Vernooij, 2001). The celebration of the Christian, Hindu, and Muslim festivities at the community level largely reflects concerted diversity.

Conclusions

Compared with Suriname, in Trinidad the institutional development - based on sustainability, participation and concerted diversity - of Hinduism and Islam was more hampered than that of Christianity. These two societies differ in the institutional development of the three major religions, which is largely the result of government policies, responses to these policies, relations among religious organizations of a particular religion and mobilization of own human, financial and material resources. Illustrative for the way these factors influenced the institutional development of the religions are the legal products and religious practices in the 1900-1945 and 1946-2010 periods.

In the 1900-1945 period the legalization of Hindu and Muslim marriage law and the celebration of Hindu and Muslim festivities reflect the differences between the two societies. In Trinidad, colonial government policies provided fewer facilities to sustain the two religions in terms of legalizing Hindu and Muslim marriages than in Suriname. In addition, disagreements among Hindu organizations on the Hindu marriage bill in Trinidad stagnated the legalization of the Hindu marriages, which was not the case in Suriname. Furthermore, in Trinidad, the colonial government intervened violently with police force in the celebration of a Muslim festivity, *Hosay*, to regulate plantation labor, causing many deaths and resulting in legal restrictions to celebrate the festival. In Suriname these types of intervention did not take place.

Illustrative in the period 1946-2010 are the government subsidies for religious organizations and Hindu festivities. Until the early 21st century, government policies in Trinidad provided less financial support to Hindu and Muslim organizations than to Christian organizations. Like in Trinidad in Suriname Hindu and Muslim organizations received less financial support than Christian bodies. The difference is,

however, that subsidies increased in Suriname during the 1970s. Besides, government policies, participation of members within religious bodies also influenced the institutional development of religions. In Trinidad limited participation of Hindus in religious practices at the community level led to changes in a festival, *Ganesh Utsav*. Instead of focusing on rites and pundits' speeches, the festival changed to a more active involvement of participants through chanting and processions on the street. These changes were not identified in Suriname.

Despite the differences in the institutional development of Christianity, Hinduism and Islam in Suriname and Trinidad, there is a remarkable similarity. In both societies *Divali* and *Id-ul-Fitr* are celebrated by different religions in a peaceful manner at the community level. These celebrations illustrate concerted diversity. There may be other religious festivities or practices that illustrate concerted diversity in both societies, but this study is limited to elaborate on those. Therefore, further research is necessary from a perspective on religious diversity as an asset for development.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Prof. Jack Menke and Rayah Bhattacharji for their feedback on this article. I also thank the Institute of Graduate Studies and Research for its administrative support and the Research and Development Fund of the Anton de Kom University for funding the research.

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Endnotes

¹ The article is based on the master thesis of the author on the institutional development of Christianity, Hinduism and Islam in Suriname and Trinidad in six social spheres (labor, education, religious practices and festivities, media, social services and politics) from 1900 to 1945 and from 1946 to 2010.

² Two comparative studies on religious diversity in Dutch and English speaking Caribbean are conducted by Ramsোধ and Bloemberg (1995) and Vertovec (1996) that largely address Hinduism rather than interreligious relations. Ramsोध and Bloemberg (1995) focused on the institutionalization of Hinduism in Suriname and Guyana from the indentured period of the 19th Century to the 1990s. Vertovec (1996) studied Hinduism in Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname.

³ The table could not present the religious populations demographically in Suriname and Trinidad from 1930s to 1945, because of limited availability of data.

⁴ This is a music instrument used during cultural and religious performances of Javanese.

⁵ Interview Hans Hanoomansing, owner Heritage Radio, October 13, 2010, Trinidad; Interview Stephen Kangkal, journalist Radio Sangeet, October 16, 2010, Trinidad. *Eesu* refers to Jesus. *Bhadjans* are Hindu hymns and *Katha* are Hindu prayer services.

⁶ Includes category 'none and own' religions.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Interview Hans Hanoomansing, owner Heritage Radio, October 13, 2010, Trinidad.

¹⁰ Interview Basharat Ahmadali, publisher Al Haq, August 29, 2010, Suriname.

¹¹ The Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha is the body which represents the majority of Hindus.

¹² Interview Stephen Kangkal, journalist Radio Sangeet, October 16, 2010, Trinidad.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Interview Ravendranath Maharaj, president Hindu Prechad Kendra, October 19, 2010, Trinidad.

¹⁵ This is a special consecration ceremony that is conducted to distinguish Brahmins from non-Brahmins (Den Boer 2009).

¹⁶ Interview Roshni Radhakishun Ramlakhan, owner Radio Dihaat Ki Awaaz (RADIKA) television and radio, September 02, 2010, Suriname.

¹⁷ Interview Bhagwan Gangarampanday, director Organisatie Hindoe Media Suriname, August 30, 2010, Suriname.

¹⁸ Interview Basharat Ahmadali, publisher Al Haq, September 05, 2010, Suriname.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Interview Inshan Ismael, CEO Islamic Broadcast Network, October 11, 2010, Trinidad.

²¹ Interview Roshni Radhakishun Ramlakhan, owner Radio Dihaat Ki Awaaz (RADIKA) television and radio, September 02, 2010, Suriname; Interview Basharat Ahmadali, publisher Al Haq, August 29, 2010, Suriname.